

‘Because it’s fun’: English and American Girls’ Counter-Hegemonic Stories of Alcohol and Marijuana Use

Abstract

Girls’ alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are depicted culturally as problematic. In this comparative, qualitative, study the voices of 59 English and American justice-involved girls give a counter-hegemonic portrayal of their alcohol and marijuana use. In their stories we see how their AOD use is pleasurable and boundaried. AOD use involves negotiated risk within the situated context of shared experience and friendship networks that heighten and promote pleasure and fun. The findings offer the opportunity to address the ‘credibility gap’ (Measham 2006) in international health promotion policy. Our aim is to promote the adoption of policy approaches that recognize the complexity of girls’ lives and draw on strategies they have devised.

Keywords

Girls; AOD use; Boundaries; Pleasure; Harm minimization; Justice-involved girls

Introduction

In western societies, girls and young women¹, especially ethnic minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status, are under state surveillance and their behaviors regulated and criminalized (Flores 2016; Morris 2016). Of particular concern is marginalized girls’ use of alcohol and other drugs (Farrugia 2017; Zhong & Schwartz

2010; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse 2003). Although the stated need is often couched as concern for the individual (Nolen-Hoeksema 2004; Gillies 2016), an underlying source of anxiety is the perception of social disorder and fear of ‘behaviours and attitudes that transgress normative femininity’ (Jackson & Tinkler 2007, 262). Consequently, constructions of deficit (Moore 2002:15) or troublesome youthful femininities have become entrenched in late modern society, and the associated discourse has serious consequences for girls (Farrugia 2017). Here, we wish to avoid morally loaded constructions associated with female AOD use and disrupt the portrayal of girls’ AOD use as unusual, unfeminine, uncontrolled and driven by psychic pain (Valentine & Fraser, 2008). In rejecting assumptions about a particular sort of femininity described as “a way of doing gender control” (Measham 2002,350), we propose, some teenage girls, like some adults, find pleasure in AOD use. Furthermore, condemnation impedes the development of a more “refined understanding” of AOD use critical to developing new initiatives (Duff 2008:391; Dennis 2017).

This paper explores alcohol and marijuana use among 59 justice-involved girls in England, (UK) and New York State, (USA). Using narrative data from two separate studies, we place girls’ experience at the centre to examine how those caught up in juvenile justice systems; conceptualize their alcohol and marijuana consumption, navigate perceived risks, and construct stories about using substances. Respondents present counter-hegemonic stories that ‘...give voice to the varied dimensions of [their] lives’ (hooks 1989,13). In ‘telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told’ (Solorzano & Yosso 2002, 32), the girls resist conservative imagery and discourse about how they *should* behave (Farrugia 2017; Day, Gough, & McFadden

2004). Their narratives reveal a ‘cultural consonance’: a gap between a particular group’s self-perceptions and how the broader society sees that group (Eckersley 2005). We found this ‘cultural consonance’ to transcend international boundaries, and suggest a cultural *consensus* based on girls’ biographies and ‘shared understandings’ that create and communicate the ‘traditions’ under which alcohol and marijuana are used (Eckersley 2005, 253). Respectful of their voices, we draw on elements of critical race theory to challenge dominant ideology and to centre experiential knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso 2002)² and to honor the power and importance of ‘naming one’s own reality’ (Billings and Tate 1995, 56-57). In particular, regarding voice and counter-hegemonic storytelling, we utilize hooks (1989) work foregrounding feminist perspectives and the necessity / power of female voice. We do so, noting that if hegemony must be constantly ‘replaced and sustained’ (Moore 2002:27), girls’ voices offer the opportunity to disrupt it. Thus we call for girls’ lived experiences and insights into balancing the pleasures and risks of drug use to be built into policy, treatment and educational responses (Duff 2008; Dennis 2017). In so doing, policy responses should seek to address this cultural consensus, for it informs and shapes girls’ substance-using behaviours; the improved understanding would address a significant gap in the gendered public health debate (Farrugia 2017) that dispenses advice with little knowledge of girls’ lived experience (Hutton, Wright, & Saunders 2013; Van Schipstal, Swasti, Berning, & Murray 2016).

AOD Use and Social Control

The representation of female AOD use as disturbing is not new. O’Malley and Valverde (2004) suggest that the more alcohol and drug consumption is described as pleasurable, the more problematic it is for liberal governments. In the early 19th century

consumption was perceived as conflicting ‘with other key requirements’ of liberal subjects notably “responsibility”, “rationality”, “reasonableness”, [and] “independence”.’ In this telling, AOD use, particularly ‘excessive’ alcohol and illicit drug use, becomes culturally separated from good citizenship and associated with negative outcomes including compulsion, pain, and pathology (2004, 26–28). This depiction of delinquent AOD use is intertwined with the legal restrictions on ages for consumption of alcohol³ and social disapproval of pleasure for the socially marginalized, and particularly if female. Jackson and Tinker’s analyses of language and pictorials surrounding the ‘modern girl’ of the 1920s and post-1990 ‘ladette’ demonstrate how contemporaneous accounts disapprovingly described young women as ‘hedonistic, driven largely by interests in partying and fun’ (2007, 253). Too much ‘fun’ is portrayed as dangerous to a young woman’s physical safety, appearance and national decorum (Farrugia 2017; Brown & Gregg 2012) and by engaging ‘in cultures of intoxication’ they are seen to fail ‘to perform acceptable feminine roles’ (Hutton, Wright, & Saunders 2013, 454).

The media’s consistent deprecation of girls’ ‘excessive’ transgressions and ‘hedonistic’ pleasure (Day, Gough & McFadden 2004; Dobson 2014), coupled with warnings of risk, reflects the cultural discourse aimed at controlling and containing female behavior. Poor girls and girls of color are subjected to systems that primarily see them ‘as social problems themselves, not young girls affected by social problems’ (Nanda 2012, 1507; also see Ryder 2013; Arnall 2016). The deleterious perception of female AOD use is reinforced by child welfare and juvenile justice systems where practitioners assess substance-using girls as ‘bad’, out of control, or ‘mad’ and in some sort of psychic pain (Arnall 2014; Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz 2004). Lost within the

medicalized and disciplinary treatment frameworks is an appreciation of the reality of girls' lives—that girls may enjoy and experiment with new ways of being and feeling. Dennis's (2017) exploration of pleasure and control highlights their inter-connected and contested relationship and we argue that this has particular relevance for justice-involved girls, poor girls, and girls of color, and that this may play a role in shaping the narratives we have observed.

The risks, harms, and legal troubles associated with adolescent AOD use are well documented (Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Reingle Gonzalez, Fu & Goings 2016; Thor, Raninen, & Landberg 2017), but few focus on the complexity and heterogeneity of use and outcomes (Duff 2008; Dennis 2017). Schinke, Fang, and Cole (2008), suggest a range of factors potentially related to AOD such as 'body images, depression, best friend's substance use, maternal drinking behavior, mother–daughter interactions, and family norms' (2008, 191). Cepeda and Valdez (2003) found that among Mexican-American females engaged with gang-affiliated males, behaviors varied depending on the relationship to the male gang and status within the community. And, Mason and Windle's longitudinal study of the interrelationships between changing patterns of male and female involvement with marijuana and delinquency (theft), found 'no statistically significant crossover effects between the two behaviors' amongst girls (2002, 73). Whilst, Arnall and Eagle's (2009), large-scale, quantitative study identified co-existing behaviors of alcohol use and general disorderly or violent offending behavior amongst girls, but no causal relationship between intoxication and particular offending behaviors.

Alcohol and marijuana use may not be directly linked with other delinquent activities, but nonetheless remain the primary substances of experimentation and use.

Patterns across the US, UK, and Europe suggest that drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis are common experiences. A long-term study among U.S. adolescents reports alcohol to be the substance most widely used and marijuana ‘by far the most prevalent of the illicit’ (Johnston, Miech, O’Malley, Bachman, Schulenberg, & Patrick 2018, 1). The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs reported that in 2015, 48% of 15- and 16-year-old students had drunk alcohol in the 30 days before the survey (University of Michigan, 2016),⁴ and as in the U.S., ‘the most prevalent illicit drug in all ESPAD countries was cannabis’ (ESPAD 2016, 14). A 2016 survey of 12,051 secondary school pupils (mostly aged 11-15) in England found 44% had ever drunk alcohol, and of those who had ever taken a drug, 40% said their early experience was most commonly with cannabis (NHS Digital 2017). Arnall and Eagle (2009, 64) also report limited use of substances other than alcohol and cannabis amongst justice-involved girls.

Alcohol and marijuana use may also be sporadic and/or excessive. In the United States binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row at least once in the prior two weeks) ranged from 4 to 17% among students 13-18 years old (National Institute of Drug Abuse 2017, 4) and roughly one in 16 of 17-18 year olds reported daily, or near-daily, marijuana use (National Institute of Drug Abuse 2017, 3). Similarly, the 2015 ESPAD survey showed 35% reported heavy episodic drinking in the past month. Given these data and the falling overall levels of AOD use amongst young people, over-playing risk and harm associated with the common use of alcohol and marijuana generates disproportionate fear and creates a disconnect between societal anti-drug messages and the routine experiences of many adolescents (Duff 2003).

Negotiating Pleasure and Risk

Scientific literature on alcohol and drug use, and that produced by government and the media focuses on negative aspects (Duff 2008) and the need for regulation. Largely left out of the discussion is social or physical enjoyment (Hunt, Evans, & Kares 2007; Parker, Aldridge, & Measham 1998); pointedly, Moore and Valverde ponder ‘why pleasure is the great unmentionable’ (2000, 528). As the *Global Drug Survey* notes, ‘the discourse almost always fails to explicitly and openly discuss drug-related harms in the context of the real driver behind most drug use, which is not dependence, but *drug-related pleasure*’ (Winstock & Nutt 2013. Emphasis added).

We consider the pleasures of drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana not to deny that consequences can be problematic (Cowly 2014; Conway, Swendsen, Husky, He, & Merikangas 2016; Abram 2016), but to reflect how girls conceptualize their experiences and manage their use. In constructing their narratives, our respondents situate their AOD use within friendship groups, wherein risk and pleasure are balanced against one another (Dennis 2017), and negotiated amongst peers who hold similar values and concerns (Eckersley 2005). This is a significantly different perspective than the portrayals used to demonize young women and individualize responsibility (Farrugia 2017; Jackson & Tinkler 2007). Our evidence suggests that in the girls’ world, pleasure is bounded and risk negotiated. The current telling highlights the importance of the girls’ situated practices in which context is critical to the experience (Duff 2008).

Enabling the voices of girls and valuing their experiential knowledge reiterates the importance of Zinberg’s (1984) determinants of drug use: while pharmacology of the substance itself (drug) and the individual’s attitude at the time of use (set) are essential components, the influence of the physical and social environment within which

substances are used (setting) is particularly powerful. Zinberg (1984, 5) addressed the importance of context, shaping users' values and rules of conduct and behavior, and building on this concept, Duff (2008) explored the spatial and performative aspects of pleasure and AOD use, suggesting that the space in which use took place and/or the feelings within the body were enhanced by that space. As Zajdow and MacLean contend, 'pleasure and risk management are embodied social practices' (2014, 523).

Research focused on young people's pleasurable use of substances and the settings where they experience and manage use is limited, and especially sparse for girls. Exploring the meanings of risk and pleasure amongst young adults ingesting club drugs at dance events, Hunt, Evans, and Kares (2007) found that use was closely integrated into leisure activities and generally limited to 'semi-controlled intervals' (2007, 92). Respondents combined official information with friends' and their own experiences, to implement individualized harm reduction strategies, using only with trustworthy friends in a safe space; with these protective measures in place, they judged the benefits 'worth' the risks. Similarly, analyzing stories of how young British adults manage alcohol consumption, Szmigin, Griffin, Mistral, Bengry-Howell, Weale, and Hackley (2008), apply the notion of 'calculated hedonism' (Brain 2000) to complicate the simplistic label of 'binge drinking.' Specifically amongst young women, the shared experience of talking about going out was part of the fun and an Australian study centering girls' experiences, reported positive attitudes about drinking and how negative incidents provided material for a 'good story' (Sheehan & Ridge 2001). Both of these studies highlighted practical, protective strategies that included drinking with friends, sharing information about unsafe

places/situations, and measures to keep girlfriends from getting ‘out of control’ (Szmigin *et al.* 2008).

Although alcohol oftentimes is presented as representing rebellion and a transition toward adulthood, Romo-Avilés, Marcos-Marcos, Tarragona-Camacho, Gil-García & Marquina-Márquez (2018) found among Spanish girls the goal of drinking was to share a good time with friends and facilitate ‘the opening up and occupation of a space regarded as male’ (2018, 268). Both of these narratives problematize the dominant discourse by placing female experience at the centre. In our findings we also place female experience at the centre and discuss the ways in which the context of use contributes to pleasure.

Methods

Cross-Atlantic Narratives

The current project is comprised of two separate studies conducted in the UK and US with adjudicated girls sentenced for a violent offense. Both original studies consisted of intensive interviews that allowed girls to gauge language and content as they spoke of their experiences (Burman & Batchelor 2001). Each author’s Institutional Review Board approved the respective study.

Our informal discussions of our separate findings led us to consider how the narratives enhanced existing knowledge, for the girls’ stories whilst reflecting different cultures, ethnic, and racial groups, showed an unanticipated similarity in how respondents spoke of their alcohol and marijuana use. Reflecting on what we knew about the content of our separate data sets, we realized that the combined narratives represented a form of resistance to hegemonic norms surrounding female delinquency and AOD use as unusual, unfeminine, or non-agentic, demonstrative of gendered perspectives that were otherwise

hidden (Fleetwood 2014; Presser 2009).

Our data analysis employed a pooled case comparison. This method allows comparison of ‘separate but similar studies ex post facto.’ When juxtaposed, the pooled data enables a better view of both commonality and dissonance (West & Oldfather 1995, 454). The method is well suited to working with a small number of studies, and, unlike other types of comparative analyses (e.g., Miles & Huberman 1994; Noblit & Hare 1988) it begins with raw data. Working separately, each author first examined her own original data and retrieved from transcribed interviews all segments pertaining to the girls’ AOD use. Specifically, we selected the *dynamic* aspects of AOD use, i.e., the role AOD use plays in interviewees’ lives, including choosing to start, to enjoy, and perhaps, to stop. We then began the cross-case comparison by pooling the data and creating a new data set from which we jointly derived new categories. The source of each of the data segments remained visible, allowing us to maintain our individual, in-depth understanding of the context of each study (West & Oldfather 1993).

Ryder conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 24 girls within four state-run, juvenile residential facilities in New York State. The research originated from a three-year study of drugs and youth violence. Criteria for participation were adjudication for a violent offense and admission to a state juvenile correctional facility. Eligible adolescents were overwhelmingly male, and so a disproportionate stratified sampling plan included all females (Ryder 2013). The majority of respondents self-identified as women of color.⁵ In terms of regular AOD use (defined as at least 3 to 4 times a week), 71% reported using marijuana, 33% used alcohol, and 33% reported using both marijuana and alcohol.

Arnall conducted a total of 35 interviews, 18 of which were undertaken with girls in custody, principally in small groups in state-run juvenile justice facilities in England⁶. Another 17 face-to-face interview sessions were in the community, including two with pairs of girls who chose to be interviewed together. All but seven of the 35 participants were White British; three were Biracial (White and Black); two were Asian; and two were Black.⁷ Girls had all completed a gender-responsive programme prior to interview as part of their sentence (see Arnall & Eagle 2009). Girls were asked about ‘ever’ use and all included in this re-analysis affirmed having ‘ever’ used alcohol and marijuana/cannabis.

Combined, the two studies included respondents 13-18 years of age, with the majority between 15 and 16 years old. Both sets of interviews lasted between one and two hours and all were transcribed and analyzed using methods of manifest and latent content analysis (Mishler 1986). With some common thematic areas and similar methodology, each study includes rich data. We focus on alcohol and marijuana use because they are the substances respondents primarily used and spoke about; involvement with other substances was rare. Although the stories reflect cultural and racial variance, we emphasize commonalities not seeking to ignore or minimize difference, but because the focus on pleasure was central to each girls’ story about AOD use.

Our analysis of the pooled data yielded the two categories of *Pleasure and Fun* and *Boundaries and Control*. Each is embedded in and influenced by the situated context of families and close friends. We retain the speakers’ words, with minor adjustments for consistency and clarity. Quotations are exemplars of near-universal descriptions of behaviors and meaning within the two main categories. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Results

Pleasure and Fun

Friendship, having fun and being funny

Girls' stories about cannabis and alcohol are full of delight. Stories of intoxication, whether about drinking or smoking, were generally told within 'a narrative repertoire of "fun" stories' (Pedersen, Tutenges & Sandberg 2017, 2). Alcohol was a substance that loosened inhibitions, e.g., 'When I'm drunk I get silly', and it enhanced self-confidence and friendships:

I just had a lot of fun. I mean I felt like I was somebody, I felt like I was, I don't know...I was like somebody's friend. I could be counted on.

Central to the pleasurable effects of the substance itself was the social context and sense of community created. Friends and peers provided an appreciative audience: 'when I get high I start to get funny and I make people laugh. I start doing hilarious things.' Describing the exact nature of pleasure was nonetheless difficult (see also Denis, 2017 and Duff, 2008):

I: Why do you think you drink or use cannabis?

R: Because it's fun.

I: What about it is fun?

...

R: The buzz.

I: What's the buzz?

R: I don't know really, just you can dance to anything; you're just in completely another world.

Descriptions centred on the contextual and integrated nature of the experience, not a specific physiological or social e/affect. Furthermore, although AOD use sometimes led to

confrontations, use and the whole social situation in which use took place, was characterized as a release from concerns and responsibilities:

Nowt bad's ever happened to me when I've been drunk or owt, apart from I ended up fighting' (Liz).

Elana explains how fun was bound to the setting and shared experience of friendship groups: 'Nah, we didn't do nothing else, well, oh yeah, we used to drink. Like if it was one of our birthdays we used to really get high.' Although she didn't use crack cocaine, profits from drug sales enabled her partying and her ability to share with others.⁸ For example, while still a teenager, Elena spent \$5000 on a skating rink rental and alcohol to host a good time for family members and friends:

'We rent[ed] this big center; we had this big party 'cuz my little sister had graduated and like my cousin was the same thing. He graduated, and we had a big party. It was drinks and everything. No adults was allowed... We be having a lot of fun...'

Laughing and fun recur frequently as explanatory factors for AOD use, but only to the point that the desired fun is ensured. Nora explains her strategy: 'I just drink and then I know when I'm on a nice level. I just drink to make it a laugh, just to laugh'.

Trying something new and chilling

Respondents expressed their substance-related pleasure in various ways (see also, Dennis 2017): calm relaxation, energized partying, and engagement in risk and excitement. For some, it was a way to 'get out of your head' or try something new, so for Christine it was curiosity:

I just wanted to know...wanted to feel how it make people feel like. ... I wanted to try something different.

While Janet speaks of relaxation, ‘. . .to have a laugh, it chills you out. Weed is just to get you through the day and beer just on the weekends to have a good time.’ Likewise, Michelle presents smoking marijuana as part of a regular routine of relaxing with friends: ‘I was smoking, driving and hanging out in the park everyday. Just chilling.’ And Nicole asserted that, ‘weed makes you chilled out...you don’t want to commit crime...you don’t thief for it.’ Whilst Tracy described drinking as an alternative to routine, ‘If I’m going to a party I’ll drink, if I’m bored on a Friday night, like if I’ve been studying the whole week and I go out on a Friday, I’ll get drunk’.

Living on the edge

AOD use also facilitated a sense of living on the ‘edge’ (Katz, 1988). Closely tied to the party sensibility, the drug game was dangerous and fun. Joanne is ambivalent but acknowledges the pleasure:

I used to sell drugs and stuff. I had a lot of people coming in and out of my house so, a lot of —police were at my house a lot. ... So life was pretty, it was interesting. It was. I mean, we had a lot of money but it wasn’t really good money because it was done on drugs...so it wasn’t really fun. It was, yeah, it was fun.

Kathy describes the pleasure of drinking, group experience and the thrill of evading police after a robbery.

We were drinking so I felt light headed. ...We were happy [after robbery was over]. Everybody got in the car. We got chased by the cops a couple of times. The way we drove we were able to get away. ... We used to be like ‘let’s go get another 40 [ounce beer] now to celebrate how we got away’. I was scared but it was fun. It was daring.

As the girls show in their responses, pleasure is complex and multi-faceted and as such it

‘elides’ simplistic conceptualization (Dennis 2017:153).

Sharing opportunities for pleasure

The girls had few, if any, opportunities for organized recreation or access to social activities, and commented on how economic circumstances constrained the search for pleasure, fun and stimulation. In one group interview, British girls recalled:

. . .a time when you could go to youth clubs and chill out for a bit but they’ve closed them all down. There’s nowhere for us to go.

With few structured outlets, girls sought friends, partners and family with whom they could enjoy drinking and smoking and a group might defray associated costs. Ada explained how:

I: How do you pay for your alcohol and drugs?

R: I get weed off my mates, and sometimes my mate, who’s 18, she buys alcohol. Or I save up some money for it. It’s only £3.50 for a big bottle.

Isabelle’s brother played a similar role:

. . .when I had some money, I asked him, he’d go, we knew where to get it (alcohol) from for £3 and everything

And for Janet:

I: how do you pay for your drink or drugs?

R: My boyfriend buys it.

None of the girls spoke about using substances alone, it was always in the context of peers and sometimes family. This was important to their pleasure taking. But, in contrast with the literature, girls spoke of friendship groups as a place to experiment and learn ways to negotiate risk.

Boundaries and Control

Girls' narratives present a carefree attitude toward alcohol and marijuana, and yet show how they seek to limit potential harms. Critically, alcohol and marijuana constitute a 'good' part of their lives, linked to shared experience and friendship enhancement, and are therefore worth protecting. Girls' self-imposed boundaries and controls (both individualized and shared), and their counter-hegemonic portrayal, seek to contradict the discourse of justice-involved girls as 'out of control'. Dennis's (2017:151) exploration of pleasure and rationality discusses a notion of 'arationality' that is conceptually interesting. However arationality appears to us unobtainable notion for justice-involved girls in a gendered world. There are real consequences for girls perceived as having no rational control over their behavior both within (Arnull and Eagle 2009) and outside (Farrugia 2017) of justice systems. We suggest this gendered, situated context is vital to understand girls' narratives about the role of control and its' relationship to pleasure.

Self-regulation and Control

The girls said they used alcohol and marijuana a lot, but spoke about staying away from other substances and described how they regulated use and modified behavior. Decisions were based on rational, specific choices and when asked about speed, cocaine, crack and heroin, Anne declared 'No. I never take them, that's dirty stuff.' None of the girls reported ever trying crack; only two in the US group had tried powder cocaine. From Jenn's perspective, 'the older people smoke crack, it's not . . . you don't see no younger kids that smoke crack.' Furthermore, they held in contempt those who did: 'Crack heads are crazy. They'll do anything.' In this their attitudes aligned with research

on changing use patterns post 1990s (Curtis 1998; Furst, Johnson, Dunlap, & Curtis 1999) and demonstrated the variety of positions an individual holds regarding AOD use (Coffey and Farrugia 2014). This heterogeneous positioning in girls' narratives is further highlighted by the variety of forms that control and self-control might take. Thus, self-regulation is also related to wider socio-cultural and economic factors. Janet explains her weekend use:

R: . . . I don't drink every day. I wish I could afford it!

I: And cannabis, how often would you say you smoke?

R: Everyday.

I: Are there ever any negative consequences for you of drinking or smoking cannabis?

R: You look in your purse one minute and it's full, you look in the next minute and it's empty! Spending a lot of money, that's about it. I don't get hang overs or owt⁹.

Joanne prioritized the need to be rational in order to complete other activities: 'If I wanted to do something I would do it when I was sober so I knew just what I'm doing.'

Whilst for Joan smoking marijuana will let her focus on the upcoming academic year:

Joan: I stopped blazing, I stopped smoking weed.

I: Completely?

Joan: Yeah completely, I ain't done it for 6 months

I: Why?

Joan: I think it's because my GCSE's [exams at 16 years], I knew I was going into year 11 and I knew I had to just fix up, I knew I had to get things straight.

And for Nora:

I just thought I need to stop it. And, from because one of the girls I know she blazes how I used to blaze, like every day, and watching her, I thought, you know, you learn from each other and I thought ‘time to move on’. Sometimes you get bored of things and you move on.

Boundary-setting, group and self-regulation were clearly articulated messages in girls’ stories, aimed at ensuring that AOD use did not interfere with other areas of life, or stop one from achieving certain goals. For Liz she hoped that her own experience might help assist future employment:

I’d like to work in a bar again because you meet new people and I can deal with drunk people easily, because I can deal with myself and I can deal with my friends when they’re drunk ...

Shared experience and friends

Although friends may be conduits into AOD use, they are also the people who watch your back and look after you. Girls describe how they look out for themselves and others, highlighting the social-networks that mitigate substance-related risks, strengthened social bonds, and demonstrate care.

In making drug ‘choices’ respondents drew on concerns around risk and security that developed collectively within their friendship groups (Pilkington 2007). Girls implemented strategies for mitigating negative consequences while enjoying the pleasures, and demonstrated how they negotiated the culturally imposed ‘double responsabilisation’ of gender and AOD use (Farrugia 2017; Pedersen, Tutenges, & Sandberg 2007). Paula describes how regulation was an important component of her social network:

But I do it with my friends. They all older. They was all drinking and stuff. I was like fuck, I was drinking too. I wanted to drink, right? I used to, I used to – but I really couldn't drink. I could not so it used to always mess up my head. [What do you mean, you couldn't drink?] I couldn't drink. It was like, I take a sip and I was drunk. I was about 13. Take a sip, swear to God I was drunk. So, you know they was like 'no, no, no, you touch that I'm gonna break your hand, right?'

Others also applied care and control to the circumstances in which they allowed others to drink and smoke. Shared experiences and friendship among members of an all-female gang contributed to the group's cultural norms that regulated use:

We used to always go to school, we had good grades, hanging out and all that, we always had good grades. That's one thing about my gang, you have to go to school and you may have to get, a C is good but you can't go no farther. If you go to a D that's it. You just gonna get punished. And like, if we getting high or something like that and you used to getting high, I will not let you go get high. You sit there and do your work while we all getting high.

Regulating one's drug use amongst friends required planning, about where they were going and with whom, and consideration of what they would or would not do. Reflecting messages contained in drug education (Farrugia 2017) our respondents were acutely aware of the sexual and physical dangers that could occur while inebriated. Countering that narrative and risk meant that reliable and trustworthy friends became especially important. Nora explained her approach:

But I don't drink [to] just get myself really fucked and I don't know where I am so I can get myself raped, I only drink when I know I've got someone to walk home

with, not even just one person, if there's like three or four people to walk home with and I know I won't be like waking up in the morning saying 'oh I don't know how I got home last night, what did I do, what did I drink?

Gayle and her friends would spend the night at each other's homes:

'We used to sleep over people's houses after we go to parties. Like, say the person is too high, we don't want them to go home, we used to take them to my house'

Acts of protection could use force to ensure compliance. Natalie describes becoming angry with her drunk cousin:

I was fighting with me cousin, cause she, she was drunk and she almost ran into the bus—it almost hit her cause she was, right, walking real slow in the middle of the street.

Ada reported a similar instance:

My mate's drink got spiked two days ago and she kept walking into the middle of the road. I were pissed myself and cars were coming down, so I pushed her (out of the way).

Regret and meaning making

Occasionally problems occurred and negative outcomes were regretted because they interfered with pleasure. In a group interview, girls said things could become less enjoyable, including fights and arguments with peers, parents or other adults: 'You become more vulnerable to do things'. They saw outcomes as dependent on individual and group expectations and the context of use: 'I'd say it depends on the atmosphere, if everyone is happy or whatever.'

Reflecting on negative experiences, respondents engaged in meaning-making, seeking to learn from mistakes and to devise strategies to mitigate future risks, e.g., ‘I needed to learn to walk away...[but I was] bevvied’; and ‘I was on drugs...it was a bad decision’. By identifying and learning from negative outcomes girls sought to improve their own and friends’ well-being, re-establish shared boundaries and maximize pleasure. Maintaining controls within friendship groups was critical to ensuring pleasure in AOD use and Nora described how this worked:

I: And you were talking about how there’s just a little group of you now, tell me a bit about the people you’re friends with now.

Nora: ...the people I hang around with now, they’re more into like school... they know when to drink and when to stop...they know all the safety-ness about things, like sex, drugs, alcohol whatever...we know when we have to do something we have to do it...

Discussion

AOD use among young men in Western societies is considered a transition into adulthood—an accepted, if risky, component of ‘true’ masculinity (Kimmel 2008). Girls are not given the same cultural message. Their AOD use, and any derived enjoyment, is routinely denounced as unusual, excessive, and ‘unfeminine (Farrugia 2017) and impacted by classed assumptions (Moore, 2002). As a result, girls’ AOD use is situated in ‘contested, impossible spaces’, where they must balance fun with ‘managing potential risks’ (Hutton, Wright, & Saunders 2013, 455). In this study, however, justice-involved girls describe alcohol and marijuana use as a common way to have fun and experience pleasure. They

find it calming, exciting, a new experience, or an alternative to daily routine. They present AOD use as evolving within and in response to particular situated contexts. Our respondents live economically and socially constrained lives within marginalized communities and located within broader cultures of intoxication (Hutton, Wright, & Saunders 2013). Drawing on Thrift (2003, cited by Duff 2008) we argue this context is critical to their performative practices of AOD use. Girls' narratives describe the pleasure of drinking and smoking, and do so within a constructed space, highlighting their own strategies for balancing pleasure against possible harm. This telling of their story of pleasureable intoxication stands in contrast to popular discourse and public health messages, which revolve around inherent dangers (Farrugia 2017). In order to tell their own counter-hegemonic story they place female experience at the centre and demonstrate how pleasure is sought, and how it is within their control, boundaried and negotiated. Their stories counter disapproving media portrayals (Jackson & Tinkler 2007) and classed contentions about unboundaried, poor girls and provide evidence of pleasure, fun and boundary setting. In so doing girls' narratives and meaning making resist normative, hegemonic portrayals. They occupy positions of certainty about pleasure, demonstrate strategies to negotiate risk and reflect on regret, whilst retaining the right to change their mind, change or stop AOD use (Coffey and Farrugia 2014). They can do this because the context of their AOD use involves their whole situated self: mind, body, cultural and structural position, 'folded together' (Coffey and Farrugia 2014:471) to mobilize attitudes that are complex, non-linear and non-binary.

For justice-involved girls pleasure must be boundaried if they are to retain integrity of their body and mind because of the gendered, dominant narrative about

marginalized girls, risk, harm and AOD use. They demonstrate how they enact controls through their friendship groups, selecting the context, setting, and substances to create boundaries that mitigate risk. Girls' describe contextual features in detail, demonstrating how they shape social sanctions and behavior patterns (Zinberg, 1984; Duff, 2008). In structuring a sense of control, the setting is instrumental to the pleasure obtained. Friends regulate access to particular substances at particular times and around prescribed activities, and remove individuals from harm as necessary. In a world dominated by concerns about risk, girls share a collective narrative of how risk can be negotiated and minimized.

Harm is not a predetermined outcome of AOD use, but is gendered (Farrugia 2017) and mediated 'by user practices, which in turn are shaped by the everyday networks they emerge in' (Van Schipstal, Swasti, Berning & Murray 2016). Girls in this study demonstrate how their everyday networks help mediate their practices to ensure boundaries and controls are in place to maximize pleasure.

Too many public campaigns '...routinely talk past the pursuit of pleasure and the purposeful engagement with excess ... as well as the social and peer interactions that have been found to be core elements of how young women drink' (Hutton, Wright, & Saunders 2013: 455-456). To breach this 'credibility gap' (Measham 2006) health promotion policy, education and advice needs to be dramatically reformed. The narratives of marginalized, justice-involved girls suggest that, despite national and other distinctions, they share a cultural understanding of girls AOD use. This cultural consensus is the framework through which they absorb or reject messages about substances, risk and harm. We contend that girls' lived experience and the meanings and strategies they bring to alcohol and marijuana

use should inform policy, drug education and treatment conversations such that the role of pleasure is better reflected (Denis 2017; Duff 2008).

Conclusion

Most studies of youthful risk-taking are shaped by adult concerns with the ‘problems’ of young people, devoid of the actors’ voices and their contextualized understanding of risk (France 2000, see also Farrugia 2017). Finding pleasure in AOD use may be ‘normal’ and acceptable behavior among adults (Cohen & Taylor 1992; Shiner & Newburn 1996) but this notion is rarely presented to girls (Nanda 2012).

Our research presents a detailed picture of how and in what circumstances justice-involved girls chose to enjoy alcohol and marijuana. Prior studies have focused on older, educated or middle class girls and women, whereas this research provides new, international insight into the substance-using behaviors of poor girls, girls of color, and girls in juvenile justice systems. Narrative evidence suggests that in their worlds pleasure is boundaried and risk negotiated. Girls’ voices challenge the hegemonic discourse and present a complex and heterogeneous account of their AOD use. Girls tell different stories from ones told *about* them. Their personal accounts challenge pre-existing constructions (hooks, 1989), and demand programs that consider and genuinely engage with young female users’ perspectives and praxis.

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¹ For brevity, hereafter referred to as girls, in line with international law and justice systems where under 18 has differential status from adult.

² Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify five critical race theory and methodology themes that collectively contest existing scholarship modes: intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; the challenge to dominant ideology; a commitment to social justice; centrality of experiential knowledge; and transdisciplinary perspective.

³ Different between the UK (18 years) and USA (21 years).

⁴ Great Britain, Germany and Russia not included in most recent 2015 ESPAD survey.

⁵ Respondents (US) specified race or ethnic background. Ten categories offered:
responses recoded Black, Hispanic/Latina, White, Biracial/Multiracial.

⁶ Custody interviews conducted with Susannah Eagle. See Arnall and Eagle, 2009.

⁷ Respondents (UK) self-defined against terms used in system: Black, White, Asian
(specify), Mixed (specify), Other.

⁸ Selling drugs common in US but not UK data.

⁹ Owt a term for anything in North of England